DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 758 FL 015 367

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TITLE Warming Up to Communication.
PUB DATE Apr 85
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (17th, Kansas City, KS, April 11-13, 1985).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; *Educational Games; Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Activities; *Second Language Instruction; *Student Participation

ABSTRACT

Daily warm-up exercises are advocated as a means of bridging the gap between previously unrelated activities outside the classroom and immersion into the second language, relaxing the class, and establishing a mood for communication. Variety, careful preparation, assuring that the students understand the activity, feeling free to discontinue an activity that is not working, and extending the activity over several days or into another activity when it is working, are suggested as classroom techniques. Fifteen warm-ups are described for activities including a detective game, mime, information-seeking, giving instructions, a dating game, description, map-making, question-answering and reporting, explanation, and guessing and observation. Notes on developing small-group activities are also included. (MSE)

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WARMING UP TO COMMUNICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ARE WE OBSERVANT?

1. WHO DONE IT?
2. SOUNDS OF SILENCE

II. ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL!

1. GETTING TO KNOW YOU
2. A CHAIN REACTION
3. SORRY, WRONG NUMBER
4. THE DATING GAME
5. THE CLASS CLOWN
6. WHERE THE @#$%*? IS IT?
7. DO AS I SAY

III. TWO'S COMPANY...

1. LOST AND FOUND
2. STICK 'EM UP
3. YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER
4. MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
5. BACK TO BACK
6. WHATCHAMACALLIT?

The activities presented in this paper are not all originals. We would like to thank all of the people who have worked with us and shared their ideas.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ACTIVITIES

I. 1. WHO DONE IT?

NEEDED: A purse with money and a criminal

DESCRIPTION: A person enters the room and steals the money. The teacher then enters, discovers the theft and asks the students what happened. The teacher sends one student to the board to take down the data in note form from the other students.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a newspaper article about the crime.

SUGGESTIONS: Use a cook, janitor, teachers' aide, secretary, administrator, etc... as the criminal.

2. SOUNDS OF SILENCE

NEEDED: Props if necessary to the mime

DESCRIPTION: The teacher mimes a logical series of actions while the students observe. The teacher then asks what s/he did.

ASSIGNMENT: One half of the class prepares a mime for the next day. This will be done in pairs thus maximizing student speaking time. The following day the other half does the same. If students are absent it can be done in groups of three.

II. 1. GETTING TO KNOW YOU

NEEDED: Enough handouts for the entire class (see next page for an example).

DESCRIPTION: Students are given the handouts and are instructed to find people who are doing or have done the indicated items. They can ask one question of one person and then must speak to another person before asking the first person another question. When the students find a person who is doing or has done one of the items they must write his/her name in the blank.

SUGGESTIONS: Incorporate personal data about the students.

FIND SOMEONE WHO....

1. IS A FIRST YEAR TEACHER _____
2. DROVE MORE THAN THREE HOURS TO GET HERE _____
3. DOES NOT TEACH FRENCH, GERMAN NOR SPANISH _____
4. TEACHES IN A PRIVATE SCHOOL _____
5. HAS FOUR DIFFERENT CLASS PREPS A DAY _____
6. TOOK A GROUP OF STUDENTS ABROAD THIS SUMMER _____
7. HAS A FORMER STUDENT WHO IS NOW ON A JUNIOR YEAR ABROAD PROGRAM WITH A UNIVERSITY _____
8. ATTENDED SUMMER SCHOOL _____
9. SPEAKS MORE THAN THREE LANGUAGES _____
10. USES COMPUTERS TO SUPPLEMENT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING _____

2. A CHAIN REACTION

NEEDED: Nothing.

DESCRIPTION: Send one student out of the room. The rest of the students join hands and tie themselves into a human knot. The student in the hall is asked to return and must give verbal commands in order to untangle the knot.

3. SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

NEEDED: Handouts with all the students' phone numbers.

DESCRIPTION: Each student is given a list of phone numbers. By asking questions the students find out to whom the varios numbers belong. They can ask one question of one person and then must address a question to another person before asking the first person another question.

SUGGESTIONS: This can also be done with addresses and birthdays.

4. THE DATING GAME

NEEDED: Pencil and paper.

DESCRIPTION: Separate the class into male and female groups. Tell the males they are going on a blind date and tell the females the same. In their groups they must decide on the characteristics they want this person to have and write them down. The females then read their wishes to the males and vice versa.

SUGGESTIONS: The teacher may list verbs of wishing on the board prior to the exercise.

5. THE CLASS CLOWN

NEEDED: An overhead projector, a transparency and a grease pencil.

DESCRIPTION: Draw a stick figure and give him a name (i.e. Teodoro Tonto). Instruct the students to dress him. As one student describes one piece of clothing another student draws on the transparency

SUGGESTIONS: Save the transparency for future use.

6. WHERE THE @#$%*? IS IT?

NEEDED: Handouts of maps (see next page)

DESCRIPTION: Each student is given a map with three buildings identified. Each student has different buildings identified. Only by talking to each other can they complete the map. A list of all buildings is given on the handout under the map.

SUGGESTIONS: Include cultural information on the map.

7. DO AS I SAY

NEEDED: Nothing.

DESCRIPTION: The teacher gives commands and the students follow the commands in order to reach a final goal (i.e. a headstand, a push-up, etc...).

ASSIGNMENT: Students make up commands for their classmates to follow the next day. This can be done in pairs or as an entire class.

SUGGESTIONS: Incorporate culture. Gestures can be done very easily.

III. 1. LOST AND FOUND

NEEDED: 4 or 5 hats, handouts (see page 8) and desks.

DESCRIPTION: The teacher (with a hat on) sits behind a desk and says, "Next". A student comes up and the teacher asks a series of questions based on the data in the handouts. When finished the student gets the hat and becomes the clerk. Students are separated into small groups and some are given hats in order to denote that they are the clerks. The handouts are located on the desks and will serve as a guide for the students.

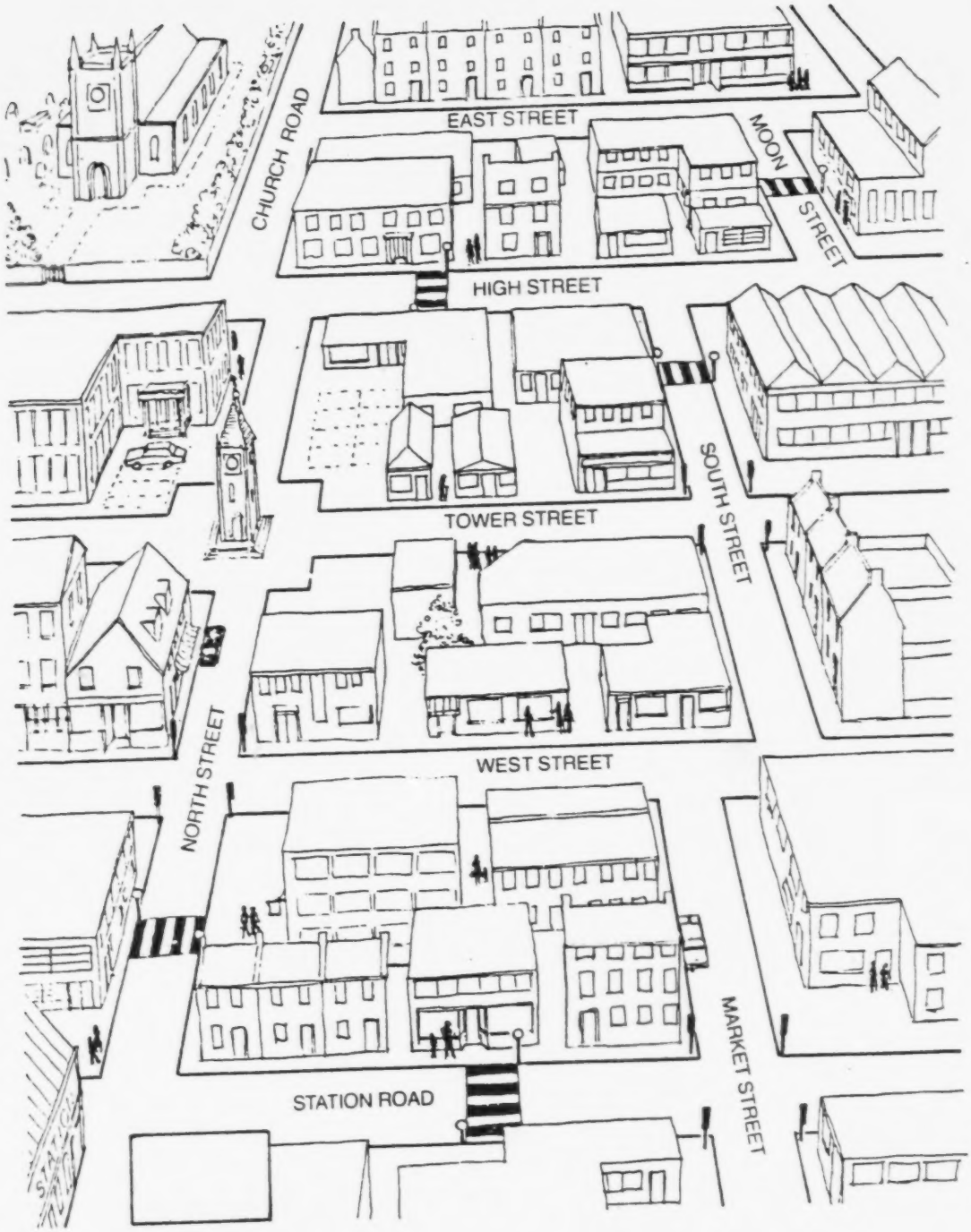
ASSIGNMENT: Each student must file his/her report based on the data given by the other student.

2. STICK 'EM UP

NEEDED: Bandanas for half the class.

DESCRIPTION: Students are separated into pairs. Each pair is given a bandana. They are instructed to create a dialogue between the robber and the teller. The teacher monitors and picks the best pair to perform. The pair then repeats it only with the actions and the class supplies the missing lines.

ASSIGNMENT: A newspaper article about the robbery.



Drugstore
Bank
Candy Store
Vacant Building
High School
Post Office
Office Building

Florist
Hotel
Police Station
Bar
Gas Station
Shoe Store
Supermarket

Restaurant
Hospital
Department Store
Elementary School
Apartments
Bookstore

Factory
Bakery
Library
Town Hall

LOST AND FOUND REPORT

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

OBJECT LOST:

WHERE LOST:

WHEN LOST:

DESCRIPTION OF LOST OBJECT:

NAME OF CLERK WHO FILED THE REPORT _____

DATE REPORT FILED _____

3. YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

NEEDED: Accusations on strips of paper.

DESCRIPTION: Some students are given strips of paper with accusations on them (i.e. Last night you were crawling out of your neighbor's window in your pajamas.). The students accuse other students of doing these strange things. The accused students must talk their way out of the sticky situation. The students then vote on the best excuse.

ASSIGNMENT: Students invent new accusations for the next class.

4. MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

NEEDED: Role cards.

DESCRIPTION: The students are divided into small groups. One studnet is given a role card (i.e. Monday at 4:00 you will go to NASA to be part of a Space Shuttle flight.). Through question and answer the others in the group will determine the mission.

5. BACK TO BACK

NEEDED: Nothing.

DESCRIPTION: Place students face-to-face in pairs. Tell them to observe each other. Then place them back-to-back. When back-to-back they change three things about their appearance and then face each other again. At this pointthey must say what the other person did.

6. WHATCHAMACALLIT?

NEEDED: Items in brown paper bags.

DESCRIPTION: Students are divided into small groups. One student is given a bag and the other students ask questions until they determine what is in the bag.

SUGGESTIONS: The student who has the bag could also describe what it is until the other students guess.

ASSIGNMENT: Students write up a description of some object and the next day the description is read to the class. After hearing the description the students guess.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WARM-UPS

Warming up to communication is as important as warming up to physical exercise. Just as we warm up physically before exercising, we must warm up mentally to the task we are about to undertake. In our case this task is communicating in a foreign language.

The warm-up in a foreign language class has finally been recognized as a necessary bridge between previous unrelated activities (i.e. whatever the student encounters before entering the foreign language classroom) and the immersion of the student into a foreign language. Warm-up exercises lead to class relaxation while establishing the mood for communicating in the foreign language.

Many teachers get caught up in the trap of a monotonous question/answer warm-up activity day after day. The warm-up should be an activity designed, as Birkmeier puts it, "to use language in a natural, useful way-in a significant social setting". Any classroom activity that practices or reviews previously studied material, that helps students make the transition between unrelated activities and the foreign language and that leads to meaningful communication can be a warm-up activity. What we strive for, not only during the warm-up but during the entire class, should be what Wilga Rivers calls "autonomous interaction". If we don't accomplish this, we fail in our job of teaching foreign languages.

When talking about warm-up activities, there are several points to keep in mind.

1) Do a warm-up every day. Teachers tend to forget this part of the class for various reasons: they may think it is a difficult activity to prepare, they need time and initiative, they may fear getting behind in their program. Because of the never ending worry about "covering the book", we often forget the main objective of our classes: communication.

2) It is important to remember that the warm-up gives us the opportunity to combine already learned material with the new points we are about to present. A common question when talking about warm-ups is: How do we know that the students have the necessary vocabulary and background to participate effectively in these activities? We must define the objectives, prepare carefully allow for necessary review, assign needed material, have control of the activity and motivate the students. If we follow these guidelines there should not be any problems. We must remember that students can do more than they think they can and more than we sometines suspect. The students have a pool of passive knowledge that is just waiting to tapped. Developmental psychologists refer to this ability to perform beyond pretaught and prelearned materials as the "plus 1 principle".

3) Sometimes, depending on the circumstances, we may not want to have a specific overview or prime to the activity. In other words, we may want to capture the students' attention and arouse their curiosity by demonstrating rather than explaining what we are going to do. However, it is essential that they understand what goes on and what is expected of them in order to avoid confusion and anxiety.

4) As with any other activity, if it is not working well, we should abandon it. Let us not waste precious time on something that will frustrate the students and that probably can be done effectively at a later time.

5) Last but no least, we must remember that the warm-up is only one of many stepping stones to achieve an end. We can extend the activity for several days, have related activities on consecutive days or we can make it the starting point for an interesting homework assignment.

The activities that are presented in this paper show how students can participate, use their knowledge and communicate in real life situations. These activities are excellent warm-ups and can also be used at any time during the class period as transitions, reviews or simply when we want students to communicate in the foreign language in a more interesting, relaxed manner.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

"In North America, foreign languages are taught in a non-supportive environment." These words by Valdman clearly express one of the great pitfalls of foreign language teaching in this country. Foreign language students are given a vast amount of information but are not provided with the time nor the setting to use it. We expect them to communicate and we are frustrated and discouraged when they cannot do so. Many times we fail to realize that knowledge alone is insufficient. Students must be given the necessary support and encouragement and be placed in the proper environment to be able to communicate.

Small group activities provide an excellent opportunity for students to begin applying their knowledge while minimizing pressure, fear and intimidation. Meaningful communication in small groups on the part of the students will not be achieved unless they are encouraged to practice their skills in real life situations. Not until students feel comfortable and unthreatened, will they be able to go on to communicate in a large group using the foreign language.

The distribution of speech between teachers and students in a variety of different groupings was the focus of a study done by Knop and Nerenz ("The Effect of Group Size on Students' Opportunity to Learn in the Second Language Classroom", published en ESL and the Foreign Language Teacher Ed. Alan Garfinkel, National Textbook Co., Skokie, IL, 1982, pp. 42-60.). The results of the study are quite interesting. Knop and Nerenz found that during individualized work the students spoke only two thirds the amount of time as the teacher did (61%). In large group settings the students spoke almost as much as the techer (85%). In small groups the students spoke almost four times as much as the teacher (378%). Pairwork proved to be the most fruitful with students speaking more than eight times as much as the teacher (844%).

After seeing this evidence, can we really afford to continue lecturing in our classes and forcing our students to struggle wirh repeating memorized verbal tenses and vocabulary when they could instead be communicating in the foreign language with a few of their classmates?

As Wilga Rivers says, "The student needs situations where he is on his own (that is not supported by teacher or structured exercise), trying to use the foreign language to exchange with others messages of real interest to him." However, to get to this point of independent communication, the student has to be guided just as a child is guided when taking his/her first steps. This guidance is best achieved in small group situations.

Pairwork or small group activities are useful in several ways:

1) They can be used to somewhat individualize instruction in a way that the teacher can concentrate his/her attention on a few students rather than on 20 or 30.

2) The class becomes truly student centered with a minimum of teacher interference and a maximum of student participation, as we saw in the study.

3. Small group activities disrupt monotony. They provide a respite from the routines of listening, drilling and reading. Therefore, there is an improvement in attention and interest levels.

4) Small groups provide opportunities for the students to socialize with one another on a more personal level. This improves the rapport in the classroom.

5) Tension and anxiety are reduced since the students are only speaking in front of a few people and not in front of the entire class. Students feel freer to make errors in an attempt to communicate in the small group setting.

6) Students begin to appreciate their personal input in their educational process. They are active participants in their learning experience.

When working with the class in small groups, it is important to remember a few tips before grouping:

1) Make certain that students are ready for the activity. They must have the necessary skills (vocabulary, structure, etc...) to participate. Also, they must understand what they are to do. It is not always necessary to give an explicit explanation of the activity, often only a demonstration suffices. Knowing what is expected of them will decrease anxiety and fear.

2) It is important to have all necessary materials (props, handouts, etc...) ready.

3) The rule about using the target language should be made very clear from the start.

4) Group size and the make-up of each group should be decided carefully. It is a good idea to have a group leader who will give some unity to the group.

5) The activity should be structured enough so that the students are motivated to participate and feel responsible for its success. If we give them too much freedom, the students may abandon the assigned task.

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6) Before starting, set a time limit and make the students aware of it. Quite often, it is challenging to the students to see how much they can accomplish in the assigned time.

Here are some tips to remember while doing the activity.

1) Circulate, observe and be aware of how work is progressing, noting errors and problems that may develop.

2) Give discreet help, encourage, prod and make suggestions when necessary.

As stated previously, abandon the activity if it is not working. Try it later when the students are ready or the problems have been worked out.

Here are a few more tips to keep in mine. These are for after the activity has been finished.

1) It is always necessary to assess the work done in the groups. This can be done by having the leader or other members of the group give a report, by having written reports or giving assignments based on the group work. Students deserve to have their efforts recognized. They often work better if told that their work is going to be reviewed and evaluated.

2) Some activities lend themselves to follow up work, in fact some of them can be developed into entire units or can be the base for a variety of other linguistic and cultural activities.

3) It is essential to have frequent feedback from the students about the various activities, about the groups themselves and about how they feel working in small groups.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that since small group activities are basically student centered, it is of the utmost importance to have the right attitude on the part of the students. They must realize the value of this kind of activity. They have to understand that the activity will work only if everyone participates and makes it work. They have to be aware of the importance of correcting each other, since the teacher has to rely partly on them. They have to be motivated and must have an incentive to work on task.

Last but not least, it is indispensable that the class become accustomed to group work from the beginning of the year. Small group activities are usually a treat but should not be only an occasional treat. Done often, the students will soon realize their value and the opportunity these activities offer them to use the foreign language to communicate in stimulating, interesting, real life situations.